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CIA's untenable position

The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) has given assurances that it no longer will have ties to journalists working for American news organizations, but the CIA policy does not prevent American newsmen from being on the CIA payroll.

At a recent meeting between representatives of the National Conference of Editorial Writers (including The Register's editorial page editor) and representatives of the CIA, the CIA said it would continue to have dealings with journalists — American and foreign — working for foreign news agencies. Thus, an American correspondent for the British news service Reuters conceivably could be in the CIA's employ.

Journalists with U.S. news agencies who once had ties to the CIA were used by the agency as sources of information. Newsmen working for foreign news media are used by the CIA both as intelligence sources and to plant stories. These stories at times have been deliberately false and misleading.

The Church Committee in its report last spring expressed concern about "domestic fallout" from the CIA's covert propaganda activities abroad. The CIA has discounted the possibility of its propaganda finding its way back to this country. But in the meeting with the editorial writers, the CIA spokesmen admitted that the agency did not systematically monitor the U.S. press to determine the extent of "fallout." Moreover, it was brought out that the CIA

defines "domestic fallout" in a highly artificial way — as the verbatim reprinting in this country of articles planted by the CIA in the foreign media.

A much more likely occurrence is the unwitting incorporation in news dispatches to the U.S. of information planted in the foreign press by CIA agents. Portions of such CIA-inspired stories could appear in U.S. newspapers, but the CIA would not regard that as "domestic fallout." The New York Times and Washington Post did in fact unknowingly print CIA propaganda from Chile in 1970.

Secretary of State Henry Kissinger has said, "I don't believe that putting misleading information out as news is ever justifiable. . . . I disagree with the practice of putting misleading information into foreign newspapers." The CIA spokesmen told the editorial writers they agreed with Kissinger's statement but that the agency desires to retain the option of planting phony stories.

The CIA's position is contradictory and untenable. The agency cannot with logic agree with Kissinger that it is never justifiable to plant phony stories abroad, and at the same time insist on retaining the option to engage in such activity.

The whole idea of this government buying off foreign journalists and polluting the media with covert propaganda is repugnant. If the new administration does not put a stop to it, Congress should.